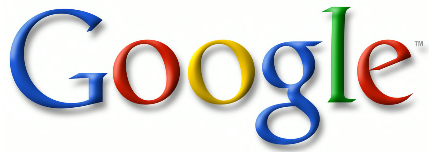

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THE LISTENER IN THE COUNTRY

BY

Joseph Edgar Chamberlin

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OF BIRDS AND BEASTS

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OF BIRDS AND BEASTS

The Love-Song of the Woodcock

IF you come with me to a certain lately cleared but now bush-grown field not very far from Boston, on the edge of a large wood, — a wild spot, stony, and yet not innocent of bogs and muddy places here and there, — you may hear and see one of the strangest and most delightful of performances. It is the night-flight and love-song of the woodcock, — that queer, uncouth water-bird who has taken to the land; whose ugly bull-head, short legs, long bill, and ungraceful ordinary movements are laughable; who is, nevertheless, worshipped by sportsmen; who is divine on the table, and who is capable of the most remarkable union of grace in movement and musical utterance, — in his one great rapturous performance that so few people have seen or ever will see.

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

You may see and hear it; that is, if you come to the place I have told of some evening in early May, when the bird is disposed to perform, and arrive at exactly the right time, just long enough after sunset so that the dusk shall have begun to gather without making it dark as yet. Then you will very likely hear a sharp, grating bird-sound, which at first you take to be the shriek of a night-hawk. But it comes from the level of the ground, and is less musical, if anything, than the night-hawk's song. You hear it repeated at intervals, *Speek, spee-eek, spee-uk*, from the ground not far away. This is the "bleating" of the woodcock. You listen curiously while the bird reels off this harsh and disagreeable soliloquy; perhaps you have heard that it is preliminary to his much more interesting performance, and you are impatient to see and hear that. The *speek* is intermitted for a moment; and then you hear, seemingly from far away, — and yet is it not in your very ears? — a steady, musical, whistling crescendo sound. There he goes! The woodcock's ascent has

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

begun. Now you see him, rising in a slanting straight line, coming straight over your head, his body held stiff and taut, his wings beating swiftly, his course steadily up and away; you fancy he is going to fly away out of sight; but while he is still in plain view, he veers to the right and begins a long curve or circle, still upward; and all the while continues that singular, musical, whistling crescendo.

Now he is fairly launched upon his great ascending spiral. He rises more and more swiftly: the note made by his whistle takes a higher and higher pitch, and the throbs are closer together. His spiral has at first covered so wide a space that you have been compelled to twist your body upon the ground where you are crouching, to keep your eyes upon him; but now, as he mounts higher, the circles which he is describing become smaller and smaller. At the same time his whistle — one can only call it a whistle for want of a better word, for the sound is indescribable — takes a sort of rhythm; it is like the rhythm

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

which a person falls into who is playing scales upon the upper octaves of a piano so rapidly that the notes take a whirring or revolving sound. Higher, higher mounts the bird until he is a mere speck, and yet you can still see the swift beating of those wings. Now, the circles of his spiral are very small; he is mad with ecstasy. For an instant he seems to flutter at the very apex, as if he must die with joy if he went any further, and yet were unwilling to descend; and just at that fluttering instant you begin to hear a new and still more ecstatic sound, — a soft, murmuring note between a whistle and a cry — *züp! züp!* — then the old whistle begins spasmodically again; the bird flutters and falls a little — *züp! züp! züp!* — that soft, delicious, intensely musical note is repeated; the bird seems to tip downward sidewise slowly, reluctantly; the whistle and the other wonderful note begin to sound simultaneously; and as the bird sinks and falls faster and faster from his height, he gives himself up in a melancholy rapture to this steadily repeated sound; and

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

now he drops, limp and quite silent, and so swiftly that you fancy he must be hurt, straight to the very spot in the field from which he went up; and in another moment you hear once more the harsh call: *Spee-eek, speek, spee-uk!*

It is indeed a fall from the sublime to the ridiculous. Here he is grating, squeaking away again on the earth, — this bird which but the moment before had been rapt in an aerial ecstasy. He keeps it up for two or three minutes at least, — a longer time, probably, than he has spent in his musical flight; for, though you were too much excited while the performance lasted to take any note of time, it is probably not longer than a minute and a half. But he does not "bleat" very long. Once more you hear that vague whistle, far away and yet so near, and you know he is again in flight; once more he shoots straight over your head; and again he is mounting his ecstatic spiral, — accelerating, climbing the musical scale as well as the vault of heaven; his whistle getting all the weird

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

effect of a sound coming from high in the air and yet becoming more clearly heard as the bird goes up. Once more the attainment of the apex, once more that delicious reluctance to return to earth, once more that most musical-melancholy whispering, once more the drop straight to earth, and the recommencement of the harsh quacking refrain there. By and by he goes up again; and you listen and watch, enchanted, until, with the increasing darkness, and the height of his ascent, you lose sight of the bird, and his performance is to the ear only, — a voice and nothing more, — and yet the more intensely sweet because you cannot see whence it comes. Very likely the performance is repeated seven or eight times. You wonder that the little bird can find the strength to make such a series of tremendous flights; and while you are wondering, and incidentally listening to a whippoorwill who is singing tumultuously from the edge of the woods close by, you become aware that the *speek, spee-uk* is no longer sounding; and you listen in vain for any more music from your woodcock.

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The Love-Song of the Woodcock

But unless you are a dull sort of person you carry the singular music home with you and hear it again and again, and wonder at it as you lie in bed. Never, you think, was utter rapture so completely expressed at once in action and in sound. You wonder, as everybody has done who has heard the sound and seen the sight, how the whistling is produced, — whether it is the swift rushing of the bird's wings or a song from his throat. You fancy that it must be done with the wings, because it seems impossible that the creature should fly with such force and sing all the time. But the descending *züp, züp* — that is surely done with the throat, for you have heard the whistling, like an accompaniment or obbligato, with it and in it, at least a part of the time. Its musical quality is as unquestionable as it is indescribable; and somehow it seems to you as much a miracle as it would seem to hear a swan sing. Rather more, indeed, for the swan on the water is always beautiful, at least, and the woodcock is never beautiful.

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At the Hamamelis Spring

THERE is no need for Boston folk to go far afield to find a summer resort, well patronized yet secluded, a veritable sylvan retreat. Fine attractions it presents, yet all are free; indeed, there is no coin current there, although 't is not more than twelve miles from the State House. The guests begin to come early in Spring, and they make a long season; yet it is a select company, a harmless guild of freedom and song to which none can object. But I pray the people of this town to go one at a time, or send their astral selves, for the wild frequenters of this Spa are timid and easily scared away, and it is they who have the best right there.

A wonderful spring comes out of a hillside. It is already a very respectable brook where it gushes out of the hill; and, as it moves along over the clean sand and pebbles, it spreads out, and gurgles in and around the stones, making the most melodious music. Some three or four rods farther down the hill it runs into a larger brook that comes down a deep ravine, just now lined with cornels in flower,

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At the Hamamelis Spring

and blue irises as soft in tint as the skies and as graceful as a première danseuse. The big brook, tumbling over its stones, makes a still bigger noise than the little one that gushes out of the hillside; and the songs of the two unite in a delightful harmony.

Above the spring there grows the most wonderful witch-hazel bush that any one ever saw. It is not a bush at all, but a group of trees. It has just forty separate stalks, or trunks, each growing on its own account but having a sort of harmonious reference to all the rest. Some of these separate stems are thicker than a strong man's arm, and they are at least twenty-five feet in height. They all bend down the hill, of course, so as to overhang the spring; and their dense, dark-green, glossy foliage would deeply shade the place even if there were not many other trees all about. Sitting under such a tree, looking up through the lovely leaf-clusters to the sky, feeling the sort of prophylactic influence that there is in a good tree, and afterward carrying the remembrance of it, one can

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At the Hamamelis Spring

understand why people make a medicine of the hamamelis!

Close by, in the loose gravel of the hillside, there are barberry bushes that rise to a height of some twenty feet above the ground, and are veritable trees. They are in full bloom, and make the hillside shine and shimmer with their pale gold color like the folds of silken skirts.

One takes a drink out of the palm of his hand of the almost ice-cold water of the spring, and sits down on a stone to see who will come. The music is good enough for an hour, if nothing living should arrive. But something is always sure to come, if one sits still in a woody, shady place, and waits.

Here comes a little chipping-sparrow. He has arrived, it is quite evident, for the purpose of taking a bath in the spring. Sitting on a stone a dozen feet away, he eyes the visitor first with one eye tentatively, and then with the other to confirm the evidence of that. No bird ever seems quite willing to trust the judgment of one eye alone. He hops away

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At the Hamamelis Spring

to another point of vantage near and looks again. Then he comes a little nearer. "Evidently it is quite an inoffensive creature," the bird seems to say; "I guess I 'll take my bath, after all." He jumps into a little basin made by the stones, where the water is about as deep as his legs are long, and proceeds to wet himself and shake himself; he takes his bath leisurely enough and enjoys it very much, apparently; and then he comes out on the bank and takes a sort of friendly look at the man still sitting there, and flies away.

Just as he disappears, there is a queer rustling movement in a clump of spreading "horse-tail" near the brook, and a tortoise comes to the Hamamelis Spring. He is not a common "mud turtle," — this guest, waddling slowly to the waters like a fat, stately dowager. His back undulates with elaborately corrugated or radiating squares; his head and legs are very yellow, and he seems somehow to be a regular aristocrat among tortoises. He is picked up to be inspected, and thereupon crawls far into himself, holding

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At the Hamamelis Spring

his yellow fore-paws so closely together in front of his head that one can see nothing whatever of it. His under side is mottled yellow and black. His particular means of defence is plainly to be extremely exclusive, and to appear very dead indeed, for nothing will make him move now, though if you poke his legs and tail with a twig sharply, he can't help withdrawing them with a quick little pull still further back into himself. He is put back into the thick leaves, but does n't venture to stir; there is no telling how long he remains in that way, for the tortoise is a very diplomat among reptiles and can long efface himself for the good of his state.

Suddenly there is a loud call from an elm-tree which overhangs the big brook down in the ravine. *Chip-cher! chip-cher!* it comes sharply to the ear, with the accent on the first syllable, and a falling inflection on the second. *Chip*-cher! Sharp as it is, it is not unpleasant to the ear. It is the call of the scarlet tanager, the most splendid of all the birds that come to our New England woods, the bird

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whose color is so effulgent that it "makes the rash observer wipe his eyes." That figure is a little stretched, but not as badly as Thoreau's saying of the same bird, that he wondered why he "did not set the twig on fire when he lighted upon it." Instantly this bird came out into full view upon a branch, and as he did so

At the Hamamelis Spring

"spread his sable wing
And showed his side of flame."

Such a magnificent object is worth waiting for all day in a much worse place than this Hamamelis Spring; and here the bird has appeared, in less than half an hour's time. He seems to be very much at home; indeed, there is a bird with a greenish-gray back flitting about familiarly with him, who is evidently his wife. He tolerates no scarlet gorgeousness in *her*. Down to the brook they both fly, and fall to bathing before their visitor's very eyes. You have almost a fear that the male will extinguish himself when he gets into the water, but he does not. After both have fluttered

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At the Hamamelis Spring

about a while, they fly upon a low bough and go to pluming themselves, and the male, stretching his black wings far out, reveals every spark of his feathery conflagration. Evidently he is not satisfied with the results of his bath, for he drops down into the brook again, and begins it all over. And then he flies out, plumes himself dazzlingly again, and flies up into a tall chestnut-tree, this time to sing his robin-like song rapturously.

The tanager is not gone out of the brook five minutes before there is a musical hum in the air, and a humming-bird flits past into a high-bush blueberry near by, and begins to feast upon the white blossoms. The humming-bird seems much more like a soul upon wings than the butterfly does; he is a mere volition in the air. The little creature hangs himself up in the atmosphere an instant; then darts hither and thither another instant, that chameleon throat of his looking first glossy green and then dazzling ruby-red at once; then hums away into the distance.

Afterward there came a gray squirrel to the

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spring; and then an Irishman leading a cow. If I had waited long enough, all the populace of sylvan New England, it seemed, must have come to the place.

At the Hamamelis Spring

MR. LOWELL, in "My Garden Acquaintance," after telling how the robins muffled their voices when they came to eat his cherries, so that their *pip, pip, pop* sounded far away at the bottom of the garden, added in a note: "The screech-owl, whose cry, despite his ill name, is one of the sweetest sounds in nature, softens his voice in the same way with the most beguiling mockery of distance." Mr. Lowell was a most accurate and truthful observer of nature, and especially gifted in the knowledge of birds, so that his word must stand against almost any one's, even if any one disputed him; but I can verify from some recent observations this interesting remark about the screech-owl. *Screech*-owl! Bless you, there is nothing like a screech in this soft, melodiously breathed moonlight song of the small horned owl which in this country goes by that name.

The Screech-owl

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The Screech-owl

Evidently it is another case of the flagrant misapplication of a name brought from England by our ancestors. If we may judge from the occasional references in the literature of England to the bird so named, the English bird really does screech. "A screech-owl at midnight has alarmed a family more than a band of robbers," says Addison in his essay on "Omens;" and yet perhaps it was the ominousness of the sound, rather than its want of musical character, that alarmed the English people. Ominous the screech-owl has always been in all Anglo-Saxon countries; and as ominous our bird is still regarded in some of our country districts.

And really this is not very surprising, if all screech-owls make the same sweet, melancholy far-away sound that one has made every moonlight night lately near my present abode. It is as musical as a flute, but as weird as a ghost. All day long the little owl sits in the door of his house, — a square hole away up in the dead top of a very tall chestnut-tree. Solemnity does not begin to express his appear-

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The Screech-owl

ance. You cannot make him blink by any antics whatever. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is a clown compared with him. Point an opera-glass up at him, from a standpoint two or three rods away from the tree, and you perceive that the owl has his big unwinking eyes upon you. March up to the trunk of the tree, and gaze straight up, and you see two eyes looking straight down, — two very keen eyes, with the points of two diabolical ears above them. He has leaned over to keep you in view. But one who has remained farther back will not have seen the creature change his position a hair's breadth, or lean out in the least. Go to one side, and he has at least one eye on you as long as the trunk of the tree does not hide him; and apparently he will watch another man on the other side at the same time! There is something uncanny about it. One begins to share the superstition.

And when the owl begins to sing, of a moonlight night, you have still another sensation. Possibly you are walking through the

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The Screech-owl

lane near the wood. You hear a murmuring, trembling, descending note, that seems at first half a mile away. Then you are not sure that it was not in the wood close by. You listen, with thrilled interest. Perhaps you hear nothing for ten minutes. Perhaps the very next moment you hear it again, and then again. Now it is quite loud; it is halfway between a whistle and a song, but a very melodious, gentle, spiritual sort of sound. Then the voice drops into a kind of vocal, melancholy sigh, still with that sad, falling inflection and quivering quality; it is so low, and seems so far away, that you straightway set out for the next wood, half a mile away, to trace down so strange and fascinating a songster. But when you have got to the woods, you may hear the call again just back where you came from, though it is more likely that you will not hear it at all. Your singer has miraculously sharp ears, and, being really near, has heard your clumsy footsteps, for all your mighty efforts to make no noise as you walk. You creep two or three times around the

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whole wood and spend an hour in the quest; but your owl hears a great deal more of you than you hear of him. Indeed, you hear nothing more of him at all.

The Screech owl

But, half an hour later, when you have gone to bed, and are waiting patiently for the crickets to sing you to sleep, that melodious tremor floats in through your open window. Far, far away it seems, as before, and yet how minutely audible in every note! It comes through the night to me just as it did in my boyish days, when I thought that a "screecher" could not possibly make such a noise, and mistakenly attributed the soft diminuendo to the whistling of that romantic and accomplished animal, the "coon." Wilson, the ornithologist, called the song "a melancholy, quivering kind of wailing," which would have described it if he had put in the word "musical." Audubon speaks of the bird as calling in "a tremulous, doleful manner, resembling the chattering of the teeth under a chill," and again mentions its "mournful ditty" as being regarded as of ominous import. Minot says

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The Screech-owl

that in the spring the bird utters "an unearthly laugh," and he does not wonder that its sound is a bad omen with the country people. Dr. Brewer, among the ornithologists, gives the most singular description of the sound. He says it is "a peculiar wailing cry, not unlike the half-whining, half-barking complaints of a young puppy."

Mr. Maynard, the naturalist, who had a pet screech-owl which became very tame and answered to his name of Scops even when it was asleep, says that his captive bird "uttered its peculiar quavering note on one or two occasions, which, notwithstanding its reputed mournfulness, has much that sounds pleasant in my ears." This bird Scops was allowed to go free at night, and cruised about all night, returning to the house in the day-time; like the cat, devoting himself "to civilization by day and to barbarism by night." Once the room that the bird lived in was torn down to be replaced, and during this construction the owl remained away altogether; but at the end of the time — some

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The Screech-owl

two weeks — he came back again as tame as ever. He seems to have been a very wise bird; but, nevertheless, he took a stuffed owl which was once put into his cage for a living intruder, and tore it into a hundred pieces.

The ancient Britons and Scots worshipped the screech-owl, no doubt on account of the diabolical suggestion about him. There is, indeed, about our American screech-owl a strong flavor of the fallen angel. His horns are diabolical; his gravity is a long meditation upon happiness past and gone, his quivering wail an eternal regret. When he pounces upon birds and mice in the night, and tears them limb from limb, and devours them skin, feathers, and all, the demon clearly gets the upper hand of the angel. He is a marauding fiend then, though at the very moment he may be beguiling the wood with that sad, far-away wail of his.

My Whip-poorwill

I HAVE always known the whippoor-will, but never until this blessed summer

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My Whip-poorwill

of 1895 have I ever had one come up into my door-yard and sing to me from under my kitchen window. The wooded hollow behind the house has long been the favorite singing place of a pair of these birds; but this exceeding familiarity on their part — for both the male and female have visited my door this summer — is new. Hearing the male's song one evening in May from the very kitchen itself, as it seemed, I went out there and saw in the uncertain light that he sat on a wood-pile close by the window. I heard the queer introductory *cluck* of the bird's beak, which is never heard except from a very near distance, and also another muffled little sound that accompanies the song, but which is so impalpable and unseizable that it is almost impossible to tell where it comes in, in the music. Sometimes the bird stopped sharply without finishing the song — just on the *poor* — as if he thought he saw some one in the window, and then he burst out again, believing himself to be mistaken, and presently interrupted the song again in the same place, and flew away

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on noiseless wings to an apple-tree close by, and resumed his singing vociferously. That word "vociferously" belongs to the whippoorwill by good right, by the way, for his "botanical name," as the old lady of Cape Cod said, is *Antrostomus vociferus*. You would have perceived its applicability if you had been with me that evening and heard the competition which set in when this bird took to the apple-tree, and began to answer another whippoorwill that was singing down in the hollow. For a long time both sang at once, indeed, and the two seemed to turn all the night air into a seesawing tumult of music. Heard near at hand, the whippoorwill's voice is prodigious.

My Whippoorwill

It is musical too; clear as a robin's, it is as bell-like as a thrush's. Once I was inclined to regard the whippoorwill's song as melancholy, but better knowledge has convinced me that the melancholy quality which most people find in it is more in their ears or their souls than in the bird's tones. Given night, distance, and wistful moods, and what sound

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My Whippoorwill

does not seem melancholy? Bruised sensibilities and aching hearts take the evening to go abroad and mourn; "the moping owl doth to the moon complain," and moping people impute their own moods to the whippoorwill. Perhaps; that is the way it now strikes me, when I have no mind to mope. And dispassionately studied, and calmly analyzed as Mr. Howells would at this moment analyze you or me, the note is a blithe, even a joyous one; weird only in those little muffled undertones I have just spoken of; and these are not sadly, but rather agreeably, weird. The song is quick, even hurried; it ends with a pronounced and cheerful rising inflection; and one repetition tumultuously follows another. If you see the bird, you perceive that he is having a jolly time with his singing. Our authors — the older ones, not those who have really studied American birds and other wild things — have done what they could to make the whippoorwill a melancholy fellow in spite of himself. It would be hard to get so many misstatements into so few words, for

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My Whip-poorwill

instance, as Irving got into these, in the "Sketch-Book": "The moan of the whip-poorwill from the hillside; the boding cry of the tree-toad; the dreary hooting of the screech-owl." Irving doubtless had a distinctly patriotic intention when he wrote thus; he wished to break away from the skylarks, nightingales, and other British birds with which all American writers had up to his time embellished their pages, and mention an American creature; this was commendable and quite revolutionary on his part, but he did not seem to know his birds and beasts. Perhaps he would have done better to stick to the larks and nightingales.

Very likely some people have found an element of weirdness in the extraordinary distinctness with which the whippoorwill seems to pronounce these words,—*whip-poor-will.* Of course we expect him to say them, and that helps the illusion; but we cannot by any effort of expectation make him say anything else, — as we can make the ticking of a clock say what we like (or often what we don't

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My Whip-poorwill

like), or as *we* make a cock crow *cock-a-doodle-doo*, and the French *co-co-li-co*, and the Germans, *ki-ki-ri-ki*, and so on through the languages. You cannot imagine the whip-poorwill speaking any other tongue than English; and if he sang his song as now through the summer nights before ever white men came to this continent, the Indians must have recognized his language in the speech of the first Englishmen who arrived. In his song the *whip* is not very distinct; but the *poor* and the *will* are miraculous. Out West he has a cousin who sings *poor-will* alone, without the *whip*, and in Florida there is the "chuck-will's-widow;" I should like to hear that bird, to see if his utterance is really like those words. There are many other birds who get their names from the resemblance of their notes to words or syllables; but none that I have ever heard so truly pronounce words.

I have left my dooryard whippoorwill a long time in the apple-tree. As a matter of fact, he returned to the very doorstep; he sang there

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many times, and came back again and again. By and by I found out that I need not hide when he came, for one evening, before it was dark at all, he lighted on the fence within ten feet of the well-curb against which I was leaning, and sang and sang there, for all the world as if he were singing for my pleasure and approval. Indeed, as these visits were repeated, and as it did not appear that the bird came up to the house for any other thing, — for whippoorwills do not eat crumbs, — I began to believe that he came just to let us hear him sing, and to show us how well he could do it. As a rule, he came only in the early evening, before darkness had fallen, and while somebody was about who would pay some attention to him; though once, indeed, he sang in the apple-tree at three o'clock in the morning. If he really had wished to "show off," he could not have planned his comings and goings better; and he actually came to frequent the side of the house where he was most likely to find the family. Though he had a furtive, fluttering way of flying about, moving silently

My Whippoorwill

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My Whippoorwill

and Indian-like, he seemed to have no fear that any one would harm him.

Sometimes, in the apple-tree, he sang so long and ceaselessly that his voice lost its musical quality, and became a sort of grind, — almost as if he had set his vocal organs going and fallen asleep. One of my friends who spent the summer up at Boylston, where whippoorwills abound, took it into her head to count the calls or repetitions of the song, as she lay awake listening to one of the birds. She counted up to twenty-seven calls or utterances of the *whip-poor-will;* then the bird paused a moment, began again, and kept on up to three hundred without a break! No other whippoorwill answered him all night, and all the other birds had long since twittered themselves to sleep. Perhaps he felt that the world belonged just to him, and knew no better way to rejoice over it than to sing right on, without stopping at all.

My birds sang all summer, and until the very last night in September, though toward the last their singing became infrequent. About

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My Whip-poorwill

mid-September I heard a queer and most interesting performance, — apparently a whippoorwill singing-lesson, in which an old bird was instructing a young one. From one side of the ravine came the full, strong voice of my dooryard bird; from the other side came a new and faltering note in answer. This bird could say *whip* well enough, but quavered out the *poor* unsteadily and went to pieces on the *will*. It was not so grotesque an imitation as the young cock's squawk is of the old one's masterly crow, because the wild things always do better than man's tamed and pampered companions; but it seemed clearly enough a beginner's practice. Certainly the young bird got on very nicely; and I hope I shall hear him again in the ravine next May.

The Good of Dogs

IT must have been an interesting thing the other night, to the fathers and mothers of children, to read in a communication in the "Transcript" about the "sweet children, to whom dogs are a constant terror." If the anti-dog legislation that is proposed were submitted

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The Good of Dogs

to a plebiscitum of sweet children before it could be put in force, I would be quite willing to warrant that the dogs would be safe from all attacks. If there are two classes of society between whom relations of perfect peace and sympathy exist, it is the children and the dogs. Some children are, no doubt, afraid of dogs, but they must have had their natural instincts with regard to these animals thwarted by parents who had prejudices against dogs. But even a strong parental antipathy to dogs is not likely to be inherited or imitated by a child. There are plenty of cases where the lives of dog-hating people have been made a burden to them by an extravagant fondness for dogs on the part of those same people's children. There are plenty of children who have pined all their early lives for a dog, and have grieved bitterly and often because their parents would not let them have one.

What is the use of denying ourselves the cheering influences of life? And if a dog is not a cheering influence in a child's life, I know nothing whatever of human nature.

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The Good of Dogs

Never was a man or woman who was the worse for having played and lived with a dog in childhood; and a good many will tell you that they are the better for such an influence. It tends to make one lighter-hearted, more good-natured, more friendly and serene, to associate with a dog.

When I am a wayfarer in the country, I feel sure of a welcome at a house-door that is well furrowed with the scratching of a dog's paws. In your dullest moments, you may catch the contagion of a dog's gayety. There are some people who cannot understand this, but there are also people who are color-blind, or tone-deaf. It would be as unjust to intrust dog legislation to dog-haters as it would be to turn over the arrangements for the flower-shows at Horticultural Hall to a committee of color-blind gentlemen.

As for the sheep, for whom so much sympathy is expressed, they need nothing so much as shepherd dogs. Splendid animals of this breed can be obtained in Vermont for five dollars. I wish I could make every writer of

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The Good of Dogs

an anti-dog communication in the papers a present of one.

The Knowledge of Right and Wrong

AND yet Mr. Stevenson is undoubtedly quite right when, in his sketch of John Todd, a Scotch shepherd, he says that "the dog, as he is by little man's inferior in mind, is only by little his superior in virtue." More than one sheep-dog, sad to relate, has kept up the most virtuous aspect all day, and at night has sneaked off and murdered sheep in cold blood, for the mere fun of it; and then he has gone off to a pool or a stream, like the collie whose story Mr. Stevenson tells, and carefully washed off the evidences of his guilt, to return smug and virtuous to his hypocritical sheep-watching the next day. Some dogs, like many men, have led double lives, maintaining through whole years a reputation for virtue, while they have secretly devoted themselves to crime. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde might well have had a canine prototype and suggester. Who knows that they had not, in Stevenson's mind?

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The Knowledge of Right and Wrong

No man ever understood better than many dogs have that the doing of a bad thing is not to be compared in enormity of wickedness with being found out. But admitting this, I cannot in the least agree with Mr. Stevenson when he says that the dog — the general, universal dog — is "radically devoid of truth." It has been my fortune to know *almost* as many habitually truthful dogs as untruthful ones. I could point to at least one dog who has never been known to tell the smallest lie, except in this one pathetic way; that when he is sharply accused of some offence that he has not committed, he will hang his head and tail as if he had committed it. But that is not because he is ever really untruthful; it is because he has the martyr spirit, and is willing to suffer for the sins of others. This particular collie, who for eleven memorable years has gone in and out by my side, is incapable of a mean act or a pretence of any kind. He will not even pretend, as most dogs will, that he *thinks* his master wants him to go out with him when in his heart he knows he does n't. He is

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The Knowledge of Right and Wrong

incapable of a conscious disobedience when his master is out of sight. He has better than a Puritan conscience; for there was more than a grain of expected brimstone in the genuine Puritan conscience, and there is no retribution in this old dog's creed. His implicit obedience is not the result of blows. That there is such a thing as falsehood in the world this collie knows, for he has seen it; the hard necessity of living much with cats has accustomed him to it; but for a long time another's lie was for him a matter of personal shame; his bearing when a trick had been played was as much as to say, "Let us all hang our heads, — a lie has been told in the world!" But now, though he is himself truthful still, he does not distress himself much about the lies of others.

There was another dog, a splendid St. Bernard, who had the same habitual truthfulness and sweetness of character. A lie was to him as unknown as a resentment, and that was simply impossible. A certain round-head bull-terrier nipped the St. Bernard's hind legs hour after hour, just to test the big dog's mag-

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The Knowledge of Right and Wrong

nanimity, and never overstrained it. He would no more have bitten the round-head than he would have bitten the baby in her carriage, — which would have been as likely as that the President of the United States should steal into the Treasury at night and fill his pockets with silver dollars. This St. Bernard's principal function and overmastering delight in life were to guard and play with two small children. Although he weighed about as much as a man, it was perfectly safe to trust him to gambol about with the children under any circumstances, — he never stepped or fell upon one of them, nor brushed one over, in his play. If he had a fault, it was in being too good-natured and affectionate; for a family came to live next door to his master, — a family with small children, too, — and when this family grew to love the old dog as much as his master's family did, the dog could not see why he should not love that family as much as he did his master's, too. He was not sufficiently exclusive. Dear old Leo! A dog epidemic came to his master's kennels;

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The Knowledge of Right and Wrong

one dog died out of all, and that one was Leo.

Logic is Logic

A DOG'S intelligence has queer twists in it. A certain collie who at this moment snoozes under a certain table, very near indeed to a certain pair of human feet, has a singular hatred of the whole race of lamplighters. He began with a personal altercation, in his early youth, with a lamplighter, who went his rounds on foot with a ladder on his shoulder; and from that day forward, the dog has imputed that particular lamplighter's fault to the entire profession. It does not matter whether the lamplighter goes on foot or in a wagon; or whether he lights kerosene, gas, or naphtha; the dog invariably proceeds on the theory that any kind of lamplighting is a crime, and its practisers to be intimidated wherever found. The electric lights are too much for him; he evidently does not know what to make of them, and like a sensible dog gives up the riddle; but if even the president of an electric light company, in broadcloth and

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silk hat, were to come around and attempt to light an electric light with a match, it is altogether likely that this dog would keep him up the pole until a superior force intervened.

Logic is Logic

A Vermont Dog

IT is to be regretted that some of the Vermont farmers, of whom I have spoken, and sheep-breeders do not exhibit their sheep-dogs. These are first cousins to the collies, being descendants of the English sheep-dog, — an invaluable and beautiful animal, which in its purity is seldom seen in our bench shows. The Vermonters have developed almost a special breed, with which they take no little pains. The dog has much the same conditions of life as those which made the Scotch collie, and some time the breed may be famous. Here is a true story of a Vermont sheep-dog which even Scotchmen will find it hard to match : Captain C—— of Bradford, Vt., had a "shepherd dog" which was accustomed to bring home the cows at night, always separating them from the other cattle, and never allowing any but milch cows to come up. One day Cap-

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A Vermont Dog

tain C—— accompanied the dog in driving the cows to pasture. At one place on the road the captain was surprised to see the dog desert the herd and take to the woods by the side of the road. The captain went on with the cattle, which were walking briskly in advance. Within a quarter of a mile they came to a break in the fence of which the captain had no knowledge, leading into a field; and here, in the gap of the fence, sat the dog in a matter-of-fact way, guarding it against the entrance of the cattle. What else could his master suppose than that the dog was aware of the gap in the fence, and, knowing that the man would bring up the cattle, made a détour through the woods to the place, to prevent the cattle from going into the field?

An Introduction

DID the reader ever see a dog perform the ceremony of introducing a human friend? I have myself seen the thing done in a way, but never, perhaps, so plainly and prettily as a friend of mine has lately,—the friend himself being the person introduced.

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An Introduction

My friend (call him Mr. J——) lives in Roxbury. For a near neighbor he has a man who keeps a carriage and also a fine setter dog. Mr. J—— does not enjoy the acquaintance of the neighbor, but he has come to be on excellent terms of friendship with the dog. Every day Mr. J—— sallies forth at about the same hour. Every day he meets the dog, whose salutations have gradually passed from mere friendly formalities to affectionate greetings. Yesterday, as Mr. J—— came out of his house, he found the dog—who always, when the carriage starts, goes circling about the horse's head, barking with joy—waiting for him. The carriage, with the horse attached, stood waiting for its occupant. The dog at once came bounding up to J—— and then went bounding back to the horse. He licked the horse on the nose, and came back to J—— again, and again returned to the horse, evidently laboring under the stress of something that he wanted to say or do. It was quite plain, in fact, that he wanted his human friend to take notice of his equine friend; he

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An Introduction

was doing his best to introduce the man to the horse, and make them friends, too. So J——, whose heart can include horses as well as dogs, yielded to the dog's earnest solicitations; he went up to the horse and patted its head and rubbed its nose. And then the dog's satisfaction and gayety were simply inexpressible. He whirled about until it seemed as if he were in danger of swallowing his own tail; and his affection both for the man and for the horse seemed greatly increased by the consciousness that now they knew each other.

It is astonishing what a great deal of the joy of life a liking for animals will let us into.

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LOOKING AT THE MOUNTAINS

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LOOKING AT THE MOUNTAINS

The Return of the Exile

IF you could go and get at the heart of some of the men who are making the money and "booming" the towns out West, or if you could closely know, as I do, some of the men who have come from the West to live and die in the East, you would be convinced that the yearning of Jacob for the home of Abraham and Isaac was no greater than the yearning of the Western man toward the land of his fathers.

I have in mind a boy born in New England, among the mountains, whose parents removed far to the West in his early childhood. The mountains dwelt vaguely and grandly in his eyes; every peak of the long series of ranges that walled in the east from the spot where his earliest years were spent was distinctly outlined, though he found in

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The Return of the Exile

after years that his exuberant fancy had built them upward to the sky, and had engrafted upon these granite hills many mountain forms that he had seen in pictures or in dreams. The boy's father and mother seemed to talk of little else than the old places and the old people. The father's discourse was seasoned with many odd anecdotes of the old hamlet and the hill farms about it, and many quaint old sayings, the property of all peoples, were imputed to some local sage or eccentric in that far-off land. The localities took on enchantment under these narrations, which was heightened by the boy's imaginative infantile recollection of them. The father told of the old wagon-road to Boston that he had followed so often; of hearing Daniel Webster make a speech in Faneuil Hall; of his companion who, having lost in Boston the third member of the party, and being in sore need of his advice, marched down the middle of Washington Street, shouting, "Abner Whitcher! A-ä-ah-bner Whitcher!" at the top of his voice — and found him. While these reci-

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tals amused the boy, they stirred his imagination. He came to regard the whole East and its people very much as he regarded the places told of in the "Pilgrim's Progress," only he thought the people were a little more amusing; and between the mountains called White and those called Delectable there was very little difference in his conception. Both were real — and exquisitely unreal. The boy might sometime go to New England, but he might also sometime go to the Delectable Mountains!

The boy grew to manhood among Western scenes, his sensibilities nourished by splendid prairie flowers, and strengthened among the broad tree-fringed sweeps of the oak-openings and by the low margins of great lakes. But his abstract image of beauty was always the Delectable Mountains that had left their shape upon his childish retina. His own little children were at his knee before fate ever led him back to New England, and his journey thither, continually deferred by crowding occupations, became almost as much a matter of a vague, unknown future as the journey to

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The Return of the Exile

Beulah Land itself. But suddenly circumstances arose which took him to his very birthplace. What his emotions were as he made the swift journey, the old home coming ever nearer, and as he arrived at last at the very spot where his childish feet had commenced their westward journey, perhaps only those can understand whose experience has been somewhat like his. Certainly in his life there had been no delight equal to this. The eyes almost failed to perform their function, as if, for a sight too sacred for their vision, discreet tears had risen to blot out the spectacle. His heart beat furiously as he raised his head to gaze, at last, at what he by no means dared to look at first, — the mountains!

"What!" he gasps in amazement. "*Where* are the mountains?" Why, there they are: that is Mount Lafayette; this great mass is Moosilauke; yonder is Owl's Head; this is Black Mountain, — far beyond is the peak of Washington. Could it be possible? They were *not* the towering peaks of his recollection. He realized, with a certain

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shock, that his memory had played him a trick; that his imagination had insensibly transformed them. But before scarcely an hour had passed the beauty of the real mountains had entered delightfully into his sense; for, though the memory of a thing that one knows never had an existence may be very dear indeed, the mountains that he now saw had the beauty to his senses of reality. And the spots that his father and mother had sanctified with their tales he saw again and again; they were more beautiful than he had imagined. Every moment had a new joy, a new emotion.

The love of the old home on the part of the man or woman who has never left it may be very tender indeed, but it lacks the delirium of one who has had such an experience as this. The light which illuminates the landscape for him is "the light that never was on land or sea."

The people of New England must not wonder if they are told that there are eyes that see something in their hills and fields and towns that they themselves have never seen.

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The Real and the Ideal

IT seems to me that no one can completely understand mountain scenery who has not had associated with the mountains some strong and commanding event in his own life. Sometimes I fancy that nothing from the outside ever really comes into our life after we are eighteen or twenty. Of course the emotions of love, of sorrow, the ecstasies and sicknesses of the soul, may come to us at any age, and the events of our last years may be the most moving; but in our interpretation of even these experiences to ourselves, we use symbols which we derive from the experiences and scenes of childhood. The maturity of our minds is sordid or generous, as our youth was dull or sublime. It is a familiar thought; but it comes back to me with a great deal of force in looking eastward toward these great White Mountains, which are seldom white, and which are glorified now, as they seemed always to be in my childhood, with the purple haze of midsummer. I wonder just what they could mean or represent to one with whose receptive childhood

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The Real and the Ideal

their forms did not blend! Did he know the sea in his childhood and not these? Then noble emotions are symbolized in his mind, consciously or unconsciously, by the sea. The mountains may be to him but little more than a picture upon a canvas. Did he grow up on endless plains, which stretch away to infinity? Then the great thoughts of his manhood will come to him somewhat in the garb of his native plains; and neither the man of the mountains nor the man of the sea can understand just what they mean to him.

One who remembers the mountains as a part of his past must like them best of all clad in this midsummer haze, because they have then more of that thrilling quality which people call the ideal than at any other time; that is to say, because, being less distinctly visible, and yet seeming more vast than ever, they associate themselves more closely with tender memories and exalted states of the mind which are vague and vast. But I think they could not have exactly this meaning to one

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The Real and the Ideal

who had not known them in a more intimate way. Familiarity does not really breed contempt unless one party or the other in the contact is contemptible. The raw, bold side of yonder near mountain, with its patch of blackened stumps here, the gaping wound of a landslide there, is quite as necessary to my bit of emotion at this moment as the royal mantle of haze.

The great beauty of our New England mountains, and especially the mountains of New Hampshire, is their exceeding individuality. The New Hampshire mountains have nothing like uniformity. Mount Washington comes nearer to a conical commonplace than any other. They are not in regular ranges, nor yet in utter disorder; as a herd of cattle seem always to deploy, in grazing, in just such a way as to make a beautiful group when they look up at you, so these mountains seem to have gone about at their own will until they had accidentally established the best possible arrangement of summits and valleys, of slopes and intervales, of precipices and

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The Real and the Ideal

chasms, and then to have stopped suddenly and forever. There is no point from which they can be viewed with so impressive a result as from the high hills on the western side of the Connecticut. Thence Moosilauke, Lafayette, and Washington are all in view; the Franconia range seems almost under one's hand; the Presidential range commands the whole; to the southward Chocorua dreams in faint, far-away superstitious light; as far to the northward the two sentinel Stratford Peaks guard the landscape; while beneath one's feet the Connecticut winds through lovely meadows and beside steepled villages. Here one has all the mountains before him, not around him; and while the view is not so incomparably grand as it is from the summit of Moosilauke, it is surely so beautiful that nothing in nature can surpass its loveliness.

From Tucker Mountain

I KNOW a case in which the truly American practice of bestowing geographical names in honor of the first man who associated himself, as discoverer or proprietor, with any

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From Tucker Mountain

spot of earth, and so gave it its first real meaning to and relation with the world of his fellows, has resulted in a more picturesque name, perhaps, than the hill would have owned if it had brought down a title from aboriginal tradition. The people will tell you that it will "tucker you clean out" to climb this mountain on foot; but that is not the reason why it is called Tucker Mountain. It has its name from the patriarch of the hill, — an aged man who saw all his children die before him, and, though he had his farm left, was compelled to deed it to the town, in order that he might be taken care of in the poorhouse for the rest of his days! And this farm is one of the very sightliest in New England, or all the world, for that matter. From it you can see the White Mountains and the Green Mountains and the smiling valley of the Connecticut, and an infinity of farms and woods and hills and streams and lesser mountains. Moosilauke commands the landscape, as he does every other landscape in which his great bulk is fully visible; Mount Lafayette soars beautifully heavenward; and

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From Tucker Mountain

at a greater distance the cone of Washington is in full view. Far southward, Ascutney gives one a thrill of pleasure, with his especial and peculiar beauty; and westward the sharp peaks of Killington and Shrewsbury make a very clear contrast to the sea of rich rounded hills which are Vermont.

A party of us, men, women, and children, came over here to see the moon rise over the White Mountains in the evening, to camp out over night in the departed patriarch's barn on the mountain, and to watch the sunrise in the morning. A moonrise over the mountains is something quite out of the commonplace. Fancy seeing, by the light of the moon alone, very clearly the profile of a mountain forty miles away, to say nothing of the vividly defined forms of nearer masses! The distant ranges were all, in this flood of the full moon's light, of a delicious blue that was unlike any other blue in the world, — solid, firm in its mass, uniform in tint all along, and yet lending a strangely impalpable and ghostly effect to the mountains. Moosilauke himself seemed about

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From Tucker Mountain

to slip his moorings. The moon soared higher and higher, defining clearly the line of the valley. On the very summit of their own mountain stand the marvelling little party, for the most part silent in their contemplation of what does not seem at all like night, but like a strange, new, spiritual kind of day. The house-lights which begin to peep up far down in the valley somehow do not seem to suit the heavenly mood; one rather resents their being here. An electric "search-light" flashes out weirdly from the summit of Mount Washington. This, for a wonder, does not seem so much out of keeping; there is something unearthly still about a far-away flashing electric light. Mists begin to rise down in the valley, to be tinted faintly and beautifully by the moonlight. The silence is absolute. It is all exquisitely melancholy, but not sad, and surely not depressing.

The little party betake themselves at last silently to the barn, where they roll themselves in their blankets in the new-mown and perfumed hay. If there is anything the reverse of

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From Tucker Mountain

melancholy, it is sleeping in a haymow. It would be worth being a tramp just to have the nightly pleasure of it. Of course, with plenty of hay and a thick blanket, you can have as soft and warm a couch as you like; and with cleanliness and fragrance added, what more could you ask of a bed? But it is odd to hear the horses champing the hay down on the barn floor, and now and then snorting a little, and taking an occasional step or two. The barn door is wide open, and the stars shine in on the sleepers. Somewhere in the night Venus rises over the mountains, brilliant and beautiful beyond all account. Of course there are some who must get up and go out to see her. But a little sleep goes a long way on such a night.

Toward morning, just when at last you have fallen into delicious slumber, a shadowy form rises up over in the corner of the haymow. "Come, come!" says a voice from it; "it is getting light!" No more sleep in the haymow. In the dim morning twilight all the people roll out of their blankets, and

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From Tucker Mountain

draw on their shoes and coats. The one reluctant riser — always to be found — is dragged out. In fifteen minutes everybody is out on the ledge on the mountain-summit with his blanket about his shoulders. There is frost on the grass. You could imagine these people all so many Zuñi out for their morning devotions. Devotees these people certainly are, but not silent ones now.

Nothing but enthusiasm, well lighted up, could ever describe this scene. The whole Connecticut Valley is a vast sea of white cloud, wave upon wave, long line upon line, stretching illimitably to north and south. It is all perfectly motionless. The sun is yet far from having climbed the eastern mountains, but the sky above them is rosy with bars of light, and this light, falling downward upon the top of the fog-sea in the valley, tinges it with pink; but still it is much more gray than pink. All the tops of the great mountains — Moosilauke, Lafayette, Washington, and the rest — are capped with clouds which follow their conformation and exaggerate their height. Below

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these caps the masses of the mountain are a dark steely blue, extending downward to where the cloud-banks begin. The tops of the high foothills are all so many blue islands, sharply defined, in the cloud-sea. There is nowhere any vagueness in the shores of this motionless sea: the line is so clear that a tongue of forest on the hither side of it looks like a wharf running squarely out into water.

From Tucker Mountain

The light increases over the mountain-tops. Not for one single instant is the sky picture the same. "Nature will never hold still," truly says Monet. The picture that we saw a moment ago is not the picture that we see now. The cloud-sea is indeed motionless, but its color changes, intensifies, from instant to instant.

Suddenly a wonderful thing happens. All along the vast side of Moosilauke there runs horizontally a pinkish-purple stream — miles wide, it must be — coloring all the mountain-side except the cap upon its summit. It tells the breathless watchers that, to that mountain-

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From Tucker Mountain

side, the sun has indeed risen. But to us here it is still hidden by the whole Franconia range. Far to the north and south the light clouds are tinted with the brilliant rose-color which only the sunrise can give. "Here he comes! Here he comes!" shouts she who roused us in the barn. A tongue of intense light shoots up above the summit of Lafayette.

But it is not the sun; it is only a fiery little cloud-precursor. More of these tongues of flame shoot up all along the mountain-top. The long sloping foreground beneath us — woods, fields, meadows, running clear down to the Connecticut — is now beautifully lighted up. A sparrow sings delightedly, and the crows are noisily abroad. A half-dozen young horses, one of them clear white, run whinnying gleefully across a pasture away down there. The tops of the beeches and maples begin to be sprinkled with gold. The earth is awake, alive.

There is emotion in the little party on the top of Tucker Mountain. Men, women, and children rise and stretch out their hands wor-

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From Tucker Mountain

shipfully, palms upward. The disk of the sun, dazzling as at noonday, clears the summit of Mount Lafayette. The world is simply flooded with light. What a place it would be to float off forever into the light from!

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SOME ASPECTS OF NATURE

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SOME ASPECTS OF NATURE

The Fall of the Apple-tree

THE tree must have been a seedling to begin with, because it stood, not in the orchard with the rest, but up in front of the farmhouse, just between the shed and the road, and much in the way as one drove through the unfenced yard to the door. It must have grown up in such a spot through a tender sort of neglect. When it stood there in the early days of this very September, comfortably laden with as good fruit as it had ever borne, — which was not, to tell the truth, very good, — it was haggard and wrinkled, because it was very old; but it had not an enemy in the world except the northeast gale. The man who lived in the shadow of the tree remembered no time when it did not stand there,

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The Fall of the Apple-tree

nor any year when he had not respectfully eaten at least one of its apples.

Even the storm that shook the hills last June failed to alter a line on its old countenance. It was all there, and most of its apples were there, when the first autumn-red leaves began to appear on the maples farther down the road; and these maple leaves, though hanging with a loosening grasp, did not tremble, for there was no wind to stir them, on the September day when the farmer came up from the field and found one great branch of the old apple-tree fallen to the ground, with all its fruit, and lying there shattered before him. He could do no more than wonder, as he went to fetch his axe, that the tree should have lost a limb on such a day.

It would have been useless for the farmer to deny that, hard-headed as he was, he felt unhappy as he cleared away the melancholy rubbish that the fall had left; and when he had got it away, and stood back to see how strange the old tree looked without the branch, there was a sound almost like a groan from the

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The Fall of the Apple-tree

other side of the tree, and a big limb there sank down to the earth before his eyes.

More work for the axe, which he thought never to have put into the old tree's wood! There was another heap of rubbish to clear away. And when he had finished it, a third big limb came down just as the others had come; and one after another all the branches fell, and the very trunk itself sank to the earth, hollow and rotten; for only the thin, tough old rind encircling it, through which the sap had been sucked up to supply the brave show of apples that it had borne, had held this tree together. And when the break was made in its poor old structure by the overweight of fruit upon the downhill side, the tree fell to pieces, almost all at once, with a reluctant, hopeless yielding that proved it sturdy, after all, having faith in its place and use in the world, and hanging together as long as it possibly could. If the last storm had cracked its sappy shell, nobody had known it. It was a brave old seedling, and the way it met its fate is none the less a poem because there is no one to sing it.

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The Fall of the Apple-tree

The man who lived in the shadow of the apple-tree, and tasted its fruit in his own declining years with the indulgent zest of a child, is not in the least glad of the room in which to turn his wagon that he gets where it grew.

The Flail-beats

A PERFECT Indian summer morning! The conditions are all delightfully present: the gilded haze; the pleasant sensation in the air, as of a chill that is softened and dimmed, like everything else, into agreeability; the charm of a landscape where all base things have been transmuted into gold and silver, not high in tone but incomparably rich, — even the dead stumps stand up like columns of pearl; the remoteness of the hills, which stared at us in an exceptionally clear atmosphere only yesterday, as if with the menace of an unfriendly approach, but which have receded now by a sudden and bewildering enchantment. The very sounds partake of this bewitchment; and one sound, which comes from some barn-floor not far away, sets

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my heart to beating exactly in unison with its own notes.

The Flail-beats

> "Dimly I catch the sound of distant flails,"

says Lowell's "Indian Summer Reverie;" and no sound could so perfectly prove that enchantment is in the air as this strange measured one of the flails, that becomes veritably musical at a little distance. Thomas Buchanan Read, in his own admirable treatment of Indian summer in "The Closing Scene," has brought in the flails, too, with a variation from Lowell's touch, —

> "The gray barns, looking from their hazy hills
> O'er the dim waters, widening in the vales,
> Sent down the air a greeting to the mills,
> On the dull thunder of alternate flails."

But Lowell has made, in his elaborate detail of description, the Indian summer a thing apart from all the year; his poem is a priceless treasure of our literature, just as the Indian summer itself is our peculiar possession.

Whittier, apropos of the flails, gives us a

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The Flail-beats

more unequivocal flight of the imagination than either of the other poets. In his "Lines to James T. Fields" he expresses his love for the valley rather than for the mountain-top; and, to the eagle's scream, he prefers —

> "The pastoral bleat, the drone of bees
> The flail-beat chiming far away."

How could the flails be said to *chime?* Is not the pounding of a barn-floor with big sticks something far removed from the chiming of sweet bells? No; for the flails do chime — they *did* chime, at least, and do still where the threshing-machine has not abolished them. The barn-floor is like a violin's sounding-board; and, moreover, under one spot there is a sill, upon which the flail, striking solidly, makes a high note; the next plank has no timber beneath it, and that makes a deep note. Besides, the grain is thicker at one point than at another, and that alters the pitch. So that as the two threshers walk slowly around the grain pile, their "dull, alternate thunder" makes a succession of notes which, toned by

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distance, becomes a chime. If there is not more, there is at least a steady alternation of two notes; for if the two threshers happen to be playing upon the same key, they are not always of the same physical force, and that makes a difference. By the way, it is now the prosaic bean which supplies the possibility of this flail-beat which the poets seem to have loved so much, and which associates itself infallibly with autumn in the senses of one who has been familiar with the country. Other grains are for the most part threshed by machinery; but the bean is not to be handled so roughly. So the farmer and his hired man, or his big boy, get out the old flails, and repair the leather bearings, and carefully beat the dry, rustling stalks, while the liberated beans leap up in the air at their strokes.

The Flail-beats

Therefore, though Mr. Warner says the bean is not poetic, it manages in this way to serve the cause of the poet, after all.

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The Frozen Breeze

DID you ever see a frozen breeze? You might have seen one if you had gone with me into the country on a recent winter morning.

This was the way it came to be frozen: All night long the air had been laden with mist. Over the fields, in the hollows, all through the woods, even on the tops of the hills, the fog hung heavily. All that time the wind blew steadily, but not fiercely, from some northern quarter. At nightfall the mercury fell below the freezing-point, so that this mist, as it drifted through the trees, was frozen upon their branches and twigs. The elms, oaks, and other leafless trees took their ice-coating quite evenly; but the thick, impenetrable masses of the needles of the pine-trees were covered noticeably only upon the sides toward the north or northwest, from which the wind came. The strong, steady breeze bent the branches to leeward, while it was icing them; and when the wind went down in the morning they all remained just there, leaning to the southward, iced and frozen to immovability,

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but looking just as if the wind were still steadily blowing.

The Frozen Breeze

Even in the afternoon, when the rain began to fall, and the wind came from quite another quarter, that north wind of the night before still remained white and frozen over the piny woods, — the pale rigid corpse of a thing that had once been keenly alive; for what is there in inanimate Nature more suggestive of life than the wind moving upon the woods?

Somehow this ghost of a dead-and-gone wind suggested those conditions of the mind in which we are under the influence of emotions that have gone by, and which we have very likely quite forgotten. A pleasurable thought sometimes comes over our souls, — some fleeting little zephyr of a delight invisible, impalpable, intangible, — which has blown into our hearts from an unknown heaven, and is gone; but meantime it has bent all the leafage of our souls in its direction, and for a time we retain the strange, delicious impact of it, not in the least knowing what has given us this delicate pleasure. Some-

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The Frozen Breeze

times the wind is not pleasant, but colder than the grave; this one is as impalpable as the other; it comes from a region as completely unknown to our senses; but the frost which falls with it leaves its chilling impress there for a long time. It would be well indeed if none but those vernal breezes of delight could blow into the soul; but it is vastly better to have the soul open to them all than it would be to have no cold winds blow. There is no boon above sensibility. If the way to pleasure lies through pain, then well and good. If one might be in Paradise, and yet would not go there because he must go through Gethsemane, is his place really in Paradise? And if he chooses to go through that same sorrowful garden, whose agony no one can so fully feel as he himself, is there not already some light of Paradise in its darkness, — some thrill of its delight mingled with the innermost, cruellest tortures?

I spoke with a great painter, not very long ago, who agreed that all our modern conscious sensibility, which is revealed in the best examples of our art, — this modern reversal of the

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old unconscious, joyful, middle-age notion of beauty, — is a diseased condition of the mind,— simply a manifestation in art of what the doctors call nervous prostration. I may have thought for a moment that he was right; but the more I reflected upon it, the more completely I became convinced that, lament as we may the beautiful unconsciousness of the past, there may be a higher health in this apparent disease; it may well be the evidence of an evolution into a higher condition. If our bodies cannot have health with it, why, so much the worse for them. Is there any one who possesses in its full degree this intensified perception, who would really exchange it for the unconsciousness of a child? He may say sometimes that he would be very glad to do just this; but would he, really? Blessed forever be sensibility, no matter into the hands of what Grand High Inquisitor-General of the soul it may deliver us!

And yet it is quite possible that we are approaching a condition of nervous supersensibility which will in time exterminate our fine

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The Frozen Breeze

European race, and make it necessary for some new Goths and Vandals, some stout negro tribe of Africa or Louisiana, to overrun the civilized earth and begin the building up of a new world on a sounder physical basis. No matter about that, of course! It would be infinitely better to have been as gods while we were here, and to have carried the flame a little nearer the everlasting altar, than to have been healthily unconscious of spiritual raptures and agonies. It is by waves of development of this kind of consciousness that the world has gone on. The spiritual is overwhelmed by the animal once in about so many ages. Some of us would rather have lived in the decadent age of Marcus Aurelius than in the times when, after the healthy barbarians of the north had overwhelmed that same age, people began to weave beautiful tapestries out of their childlike unconsciousness. Somehow it comes about that these periods of consciousness, these avatar-generations, the incarnations of divine-knowledge in races of super-civilized people, correspond with epochs of decadence in crea-

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tive art. In the revulsions which follow, the fruits of this soul-consciousness seem to be lost; but they never are. Some other decadent age will take them up and build still higher upon them, attaining a more godlike consciousness. And at last — well, God knows what will come then!

The Frozen Breeze

All this may seem a very long way to have gone from a mere glimpse of a pine wood on the shore of a river, bent southward still by a cold wind that had ceased to blow. And then, again, it may seem very like getting nowhere at all. It depends upon the point of view. But at least the woods were beautiful. I almost wish that I had remained and studied the plumy foliage of the pines, and the soft, white frost lace-work of the hemlocks, rather than strayed into such a far and fruitless field.

The Snow-storm

THE woods were not, as I ploughed through them in rubber boots in the thickest of that storm in which the flakes were so great that it was called the "snowball storm," likely to suggest whimsical thoughts.

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The Snow-storm

The spectacle was too vast and beautiful for that. As you went up out of the village street, underneath the tall elms, you got a spattering of wet snow from the high, drooping branches, which gave you the impression that the woods would be unpleasantly wet; but no sooner were you out of the street, and up in the edge of the thicket at the top of the hill, than you found quite another state of things. There was no unpleasant dampness about the snow there. On the hillside the clusters of burdened birches spread apart, fountain-like, each group radiating from its centre, as they always do after a heavy snow-storm; but this time the curves that the bended-down trees make are very flat indeed; the unfortunate birch fountain looks weary and unable to send its waters aloft.

The wood-lane, lined with these small birch-trees, is quite impassable. They have bent down until they are almost upon the ground; covered with snow, they look like round white rocks; but when you step upon them, or try to shake the snow from them, they spring up

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The Snow-storm

and cover you with a heavy shower. For a little way you can progress by liberating the trees; but it is impossible to set them all free. You strike out into the woods, ploughing among the trunks of the tent-like pine-trees, whose descending branches presently begin to flout you, too. You get discouraged and strike out into the field. What is this? A drift of snow upheld before you in the very air, entirely away from the ground? No; it is merely a big branch of a stout savin or red cedar tree, the most self-willed creature in the vegetable world: it will not bend much, and yet its myriad little permeating branchlets hold a prodigious amount of snow, and make the tree really a snow-bank in the air. Here and there are other savins in the field; they just have their white-bonneted heads tipped pettishly this way and that, like a troop of Puritan maidens in ermine going home from a singing-school jilted by their cavaliers. But it is only as you look at these trees from the windward side that they are all in white; their impenetrability has left them almost

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The Snow-storm

black on the leeward side, though the all-pervading snow shines through.

The oaks show something of the same contrast between their two sides, though they are not so impenetrable. Seen from the windward, a grove of them presents a marvellous sight. The trunks, the branches, are all swollen enormously, and all white, white, white! No dark line of the tree's bark anywhere, and no sunlight and shadow to lend the great mass of white any tint of blue or rose. Meantime fresh clouds of snow whirl against them. Turning back against the storm, your eye reaches but a few rods through the thick-falling mass. But there are no blizzard terrors in this kindly New England storm. The air seems warm. Your walk through the deep snow has thrown you into a perspiration. You feel tempted to do as you did when you were a boy, — sit down squarely in the snow and pile it up around you. You think of the influenza, and don't do it.

Where are all the winter birds — the jays, the chickadees, the goldfinches, the snow-

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The Snow-storm

birds — that were twittering and singing in these same fields the day before? There is no sign of them here; no doubt they are all deep in the woods with the little kinglets, sheltered under the broad-spreading pine branches, and as warm as they could wish to be.

Following the road back from the woods and the fields, you pass through an avenue of elms. Up here on the breezy hill there is no showering of wet snow from them. They are more stately and urnlike than ever, but weirder still and more un-treelike than even the swollen oaks. They are an avenue of graceful coral shapes on the bottom of the sea, romantic beyond description. As you approach human habitations, the whimsical aspect of the storm gets possession of you. The gable-end of your house is more facelike than ever; but it now has the face of an old, old man. From the cornice a thick mane of white hair hangs down; below, the sloping snow-covered roof of the long front porch is a moustache; and down the steps and the terrace streams the long white beard. The space under the porch is

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The Snow-storm

the dark mouth, and the windows above, eyes always, look more deeply sunk than usual. You dismiss this grim whimsicality when you hear the English sparrows scolding under the eaves. If they should go into the deep woods with the kinglets, they would have no occasion to scold; but let us and the kinglets thank Heaven that they don't go there to disturb their betters!

The Ice-storm

AN ice-storm is a painful thing to a lover of Nature, because it destroys many small trees and shrubs, and mutilates many more; but it affords some weird, fantastic, strangely beautiful sights. Nature, under its influence, abandons the real and gives herself up to a sort of fantastic dream. Looking out in the gray of the morning upon the country up in the hills to the westward of the city, my first unworthy impression was that the landscape had been oxidized over night, as they oxidize silver at Attleborough; but a glance or two more was enough to show me colors everywhere which quite destroyed this impression. The near elm-trees droop more than

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The Ice-storm

ever, weighted down with ice. The apple-trees, with innumerable reddish twigs coated heavily with the most transparent of ice, are white in detail, but pink in the mass. Down across the road a clump of white birches, all bending outward from their common centre, are bowed down until their tops touch the ground. A group of sumachs, fringing the edge of an old cellar-hole, look more like stags' horns than ever. Their coating of ice has exaggerated them almost to the dignity of elks' horns. Far away the distant hills glitter in a suffusion of silvery light.

I put on a pair of rubber boots and a mackintosh and start out for the woods. The boots go grating through the shallow crust, and the walking is not particularly easy, but the splendor and wildness of the spectacle put all thought of the hard walking out of my mind. Crossing the field and descending into a ravine, the loosened icy fragments from the tall blades of grass rattle down after me like a hail-storm on a glass roof. Here is a clump of cedars, pitch pines, and white birches growing on the

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The Ice-storm

side of the hill, with a little extemporized pond at its base. The birches are the worst victims of the storm. Their numberless twigs hold an immense amount of ice, and the trees have not stiffness enough to enable them to stand up under the weight. They are a sort of steely purple-pink color, delicate beyond expression. The red cedars do not mind it, of course; the ice makes their leaves look like coral, and their tips are coquettishly inclined to one side, and that is about all. The pitch pines are sturdier and bristlier than ever, and picturesque, as they always are. The surface of the pond is a clear, brilliant Nile-green, the ice and snow showing through the shallow water, and its surface seeming to gather the light from snow and clouds all about.

In the woods, everything is strange, titanic, startling. It is a sort of elemental wood; it seems almost as if one had suddenly stepped into one of those preposterous forests of the carboniferous period, when the heavy and motionless air supported fantastic and terrible vegetable growths. Every tree is changed by

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The Ice-storm

the ice, which glitters in many colors, into something unlike itself. The chestnuts and oaks stand sturdily in their ice coats, but creak and groan ominously in the slow, strong wind. The dead branch of an oak-tree comes crashing to the ground, broken off by the weight of the bending branches above it. A cold rain begins to fall, and the ice melts slowly; now and then a shower of it rattles through the branches. A straining bush shakes off its ice all at once, and straightens itself up as if alive, making more noise about it than one would fancy a large tree could make. The Indian surely got his idea of a tepee from a white pine in an ice-storm, with its pointed top, its outer drooping sides so heavily coated with ice that neither rain nor light can penetrate them, and its inner space dark and fully protected. But under this great pine-tree the snow is strewn, first, with glass beads of ice from the branches, then thickly with the green needles broken off, and then with occasional pitiful green branches. Looking through an opening, one gets a broad view

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The Ice-storm

of a tall, peaked, drooping-branched pine crowning and commanding a forest of prostrate birches, whose curved stems make billows of pinkish-gray color.

It is a new sensation, as one passes along, to help a prostrate young pine to its feet with a few rough but friendly blows. It gives one a fine sense of doing something to return Nature's favors. (Nature, before this, has helped me to my feet more than once. It is n't much to knock the ice off the branches of a young pine that has fallen prone, and set it upright again; but it is something. Who knows? Perhaps it is credited to my deplorable account.) The woods are noisy with falling ice and creaking branches, but there are sounds more familiar than these. One might almost expect, in view of the strangeness of the aspect of things, to meet at some turn of the path one of those wide-mouthed palæozoic reptiles; but, instead, he hears a small colony of blue-jays complaining from the branches of a tree. There are chickadees, too, who never complain, no matter what the weather may be;

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The Ice-storm

and far down in a ravine, in the lowermost branches of a birch, there are other queer little birds whom I do not know. The wood roads it is impossible to follow, for the laden branches overhang the path, extending clear across it, close to the ground. One must pick his way through as best he can, and run the risk of unexpectedly going down into some little pond over the tops of his boots. But with all its exigencies, the walk is most enjoyable and inspiring.

Here is a highway which crosses the woods. It is worth while to follow it a mile or two, especially as it presently comes out upon a meadow which is traversed by an overflowing brook. Its stream is not frozen, but of that same icy green color, and now fringed with a glittering line of alders, fantastic in their ice, like everything else. Here, where the brook has been straightened out by some thrifty cultivator, there is a row of pollard willows, their round tops as pink as can be. The rain slants along the hills, half a mile away. Here is a farmhouse, with a big barn,

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The Ice-storm

but not a living creature in sight, except some draggled doves on the lee side of a cote. Everybody else has sense enough to stay indoors on such a day. Three telephone wires are carried on high poles along this roadside, and these incessantly drop long strips of ice, giving one the impression that they have fallen from the clouds just as they are. I have, from sheer æsthetic necessity, got into the habit of visually ignoring the existence of telegraph and telephone wires in the country, and this habit no doubt helps to make these descents of ice out of the air somewhat startling.

But another path, not quite impassable, invites to the woods again. The rain is still falling lightly. There are large birch-trees which have been quite unable to hold up under the weight, and have snapped clear off. There will be more havoc before all the branches are clear. With all its weird splendors, one wishes that the ice-storm had never come.

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The Pussy Willows

THE beauty of willow "pussies" is to be fully appreciated only by those who go afield or a-wood after them. They are flowers in the truest sense of the word, — or, rather, they are masses of many flowers in one catkin, which has all the effect of a large flower growing on a bush with many others. The tints and forms of our native willow catkins vary a great deal with the species and sex. Some of them are large, yellow, and whiskered, and make a picturesque mass of bloom upon a bush growing alone or in the midst of other vegetation. Branches of them in vases are certainly very decorative. But they are not so pretty as the little rosy-cheeked catkins of another species, which grow upon the branch almost as thick as they can be. At this time a spray of them presents a remarkably beautiful effect, for on the same branch will be found catkins whose tiny individual blossoms are not open, but are simply red-cheeked buds, and also those which are open and very yellow. In both the budded and the completely blossomed state they are covered with a silvery

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The Pussy Willows

fuzz, which gives them, in the light, a changeable and almost iridescent effect. The rosy color generally preponderates, though there is enough of the gold to make a delicious blending of the two tints. The catkins of the larger, whiskered sort are exceedingly fragrant. A few sprays of them in a vase perfume with a sweet woodsy fragrance the air of the room in which I write.

The other morning, as I came into town, I saw an old man sitting in the corner of the car hugging a large armful of these red-cheeked pussy willows. He was very plainly dressed, and looked like a working-man. His face beamed as he looked at the beautiful mass of blooms in his arms and then glanced at the people about him in the car. He seemed to draw the flowers closer to him and gloat over them. He noticed that an elderly gentleman near him looked at him in a friendly way; and by and by he moved over to where this gentleman sat, extended a couple of branches of the willows toward him, and said, "Excuse me, sir; but if you 're the kind of man I take

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The Pussy Willows

you to be, you 'll appreciate that." The gentleman took the branches, and thanked the old man heartily. Everybody looked pleased, and the old man began a conversation with some of the people about him. He gave two or three sprays to some children, and entered upon an eloquent little tribute of praise to these flowers of the willows and the place where they grew. This he did in a simple, hearty way that showed his earnest delight in them. He lived in Boston, he said, in a place where no green thing was to be seen; but he had risen very early and taken the first train out, and had gathered the "pussies," and would be back in his dull brick quarter at an early hour. He told no more of his circumstances; but it was easy to make the story longer in one's own mind, — especially as the old man went out of the car at a station in town, looking serenely happy and hugging closer his mass of willow blossoms. I made sure there was a granddaughter to whom he was taking them.

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Earliest Flowers

THERE is a dainty flower in bloom in the woods, very, very early in the spring, which has never been celebrated by any poet or out-of-door writer, so far as I am aware. It is the blossom of the hazel-bush. Perhaps these flowers have escaped the poet's eye because they are so very small; but their color is so intense that, if the poet's eyes were sharp, it must have made up for want of size. They are exceedingly bright red little hairy bunches, an inch or two apart on the stalks; and together with the sterile yellowish catkins which the same bushes bear, they give the leafless stems of the hazel rather a gay appearance. They are so very little, and at the same time so assertive in their intense color and their hairy projectiveness, that they are quite comical. Somewhat more dignified are the little honey-yellow flowers which cluster all over the branches of the aromatic spice-bush or fever-bush. They grow so thickly that they quite hide the stems of the bush, in places, and give this very attractive shrub a decided pre-eminence at this moment among the flowering

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trees of the woods. Each blossom is like a little greenish-yellow rose. To get their perfume you must break off a twig, and then put the broken end of the twig to your nostrils. To some few people the very decided spicy aroma of the wood is unpleasant ; to me it is highly agreeable. A bright show is made in the woods just now by another bush, the high-bush blueberry, to wit ; but in this case the show is made by the pink buds, for the flowers are not yet out. They will come soon, however, and, like the others, before the leaves.

This little enumeration is enough to show that the hepatica and the bloodroot do not have April all to themselves in the woods. On the ground, to be sure, there is nothing to rival these incomparable spring flowers. The *Symplocarpus fetidus*, otherwise known as the skunk cabbage, does, indeed, more than rival them in its size and in the quantity of its perfume, but in point of quality the less said of the Symplocarpus the better. However, this much may honestly be said in its favor : it is quite unobjectionable if you let it alone.

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Earliest Flowers

It may also be said, as a sort of presumptive word in the skunk cabbage's behalf, that a very delicate and high-bred lady of the wood, the sweet white violet, the little *blanda*, does not at all object to its society. These two are so frequently found together that one might assume that they were fond of each other. The pretty plants of this violet assert themselves in April; but the flowers, although they are early, will hardly amount to much before May.

Spring Industries in the Wood

THOUGH the leaves and flowers may be behind their "record," and the birds tardy, animal and insect life in general wakes very early in the year. Lucky-bugs and skaters skim the broken surface of the brooks over which blossoming alders, willows, red maples, and poplars bend; it is just as interesting now to lean over the bridge-rail and watch these insects darting about, each accompanied everywhere by his round shadow on the bottom of the brook, as it was years ago when one was a child. The snakes are out, of course, — big sluggish black ones and

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Spring Industries in the Wood

extremely lively striped ones. Yesterday a friend and I, while walking out, started up a garter snake; the creature was halfway between us two. One of the two men cares nothing about snakes, and stood perfectly still; the other has an instinctive horror of them, and recoiled a little; whereupon the little snake, with red tongue darting, made straight for the recoiling person as if he were going to eat him up. Evidently he saw which way out of his dilemma was the safer. Several kinds of beetles and bees are astir; and yesterday, after I had gathered a bunch of the bluest hepaticas, it seemed to me that one of the flowers had taken wing and was flying all about my head; it turned out to be a small blue butterfly, wonderfully beautiful and light upon the wing. There were white and yellow butterflies, too.

I sank lazily down on a warm bed of dry leaves on a sunny slope, and as I lay there, quite relaxed and utterly indolent, I saw right before me an accusing example of the most strenuous activity that it is possible to conceive.

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Spring Industries in the Wood

Two ants were carrying home the dried body of some long sort of worm. Neither ant was a twentieth part of the bulk of his freight, but away they went with it, down into and up out of cavities, over sinking leaves, pulling, pushing, lifting, dragging, all with the most feverish haste. The sluggard had not gone to the ant, — the ant had come to the sluggard; but the sluggard — which was I — was not wise; he did not get up and go home and write his article by daylight, but lay there still, and by and by loafed on, and left all the work to be done by the aid of the ten o'clock oil.

And, as for insects, if it were necessary for me to be one, I should not be an ant; I would much rather be one of those lucky-bugs back there on the amber brook, skimming about in the sunshine and playing bo-peep with my shadow on the bottom of the stream.

As to the Mud

A WALK out along country roads and across fields during a late and frosty spring is a lesson in everlasting philosophy. You see the sun standing high in the heavens.

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As to the Mud

You feel his genial life-renewing influences. You hear the robins, the bluebirds, the song sparrows, and the purple finches rejoicing in what they bravely seem to regard as the vernal season. You see plump buds on the elms and red maples. You feel lifted up, spiritualized, etherealized; and then all at once you break through a frosted surface into deep mud, and are thus forcibly brought back to earthly things. You are reminded that the mud is just as much a sign of spring as the swelling buds on the trees and the singing birds in them; and that you must keep your eyes on the ground rather more than in the heavens. You are convinced that the spiritual has necessarily a basis of the material. The sun cannot swell the buds, and start the earth's life joyfully upward and forward, without also thawing the frost out of the field and putting you ankle deep in the mire. The purely spiritual is abnormal and unhealthy; to be natural it must have a little earth mixed with it. Generally the same heavenly fire that sets all the highest emotions in your heart to swelling thaws out a little mud down there

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As to the Mud

somewhere too. We ought not to be discouraged by it. All we can do is to put on our moral overshoes, and make sure that we don't walk in the mud for the mud's sake.

Lost in the Fells

THERE are many people in Boston who complain of inability to find any new and thoroughly distracting amusement. Why not go out and get lost in the Fells at nightfall, as I did the other night? Getting lost in the woods is not a distraction which is the exclusive property of the indiscreet hunter in the wilds of Canada, or the poor boy seeking his cows on the New Hampshire hills; it is within the reach of the richest and best-lodged inhabitant of Boston.

If the well-lodged inhabitant does not believe it, let him attempt to walk from the western edge of the Middlesex Fells in Winchester to Malden, starting about half an hour before sunset and passing through the wilderness behind Pine Hill. If he does not get lost before he emerges, and grope his way with delightful despair over a savage tract of rocks

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and thickets, I shall have to congratulate him on vastly better qualities as a woodsman than my own.

I know that one may get lost there, because I tried it myself the other night. It all began with a search for a certain jungle of wild trumpet honeysuckle ; I found it just before sunset. It is a romantic place, and masses of the honeysuckle grow and bloom there. The trees are mostly pines, and are tall and gloomy. Underneath them, growing on pretty rough ground, skirting an old field, there is a tangled growth of barberry bushes and other wild vegetation ; and clambering here and there and everywhere are the vines of the honeysuckle, which at this midsummer season are covered with sprays and tufts of rich pink and yellow blooms.

Nothing could be more beautiful than this wilderness of honeysuckle, lighting up the gloom of the woods with its touches of brilliant color. Here and there is the trunk of a fallen pitch-pine, over whose dead mass the flowering vine riots, converting it into a thing

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of beauty. You may gather the blossoms by the armful and not rob the vines; and when you have got enough, you may find, in the openings of the woods and the deserted fields, where immense old apple-trees stand to testify to former habitations in the wilderness, yellow daisies that do not by any means go ill with the honeysuckle, and many other midsummer wild flowers. Having got your honeysuckles, you may set out across the woods for Malden, to get lost.

Of course you are sure to come out somewhere if you keep on long enough. But before you come out you may traverse a succession of rocky, briery ridges and dark ravines, where you will have to pick your way carefully to avoid getting into the mire, and will come out occasionally upon the tops of ledgy knolls whence you can see a great distance, but nothing at all save woods and ravines and other such knolls as you are standing upon. You will follow up many paths and wood roads which lead nowhere at all, apparently, but dissipate themselves in the

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woods, as if they too had started out to cross the Fells, and had hopelessly and forever lost their way. Meantime, you do not feel that you are alone. The birds, all sun-worshippers, are singing their customary vesper service. The robins sing as furiously as usual, and the veery sits on the top of a tree, as is usual with him at sunset, and sets up his queer, delicate, metallic trill,— the weirdest sound that the woods give forth. The fireflies undertake to light your path. It seems to me every year that the fireflies are more brilliant than they ever were before. In my wanderings I came up against the face of an abrupt ledge about thirty feet high. Over the whole rock surface and among projecting bushes the fireflies were engaged in as mad a dance as one ever saw in their favorite and most especial swamp. Set off against the background of this ledge, this maze of zigzagging intense gleams made a most startling and beautiful picture. All alone, it was worth the trouble of getting lost to see.

Passing through the thickets to the knolls, and from these back again into the depths of

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the woods, I passed through actual layers of light and darkness. The sky was covered with long streaks of cirrus clouds, which held the sunlight in crimson bars of light, and prolonged the twilight, besides affording one element of beauty the more ; but it was only in the open spaces that I got much benefit of this light. The thickets were dark enough, and for the most part sadly rocky. The sharp edges of all the stones seem to have been left upward in the Middlesex Fells. As the night advanced, that vague and unregarded sense of alarm, which one inherits in his maturity, so to speak, from his boyhood, came over me. There is nothing to be afraid of, and one is n't afraid ; but there is nevertheless a sense as of some impalpable but formidable enemy, that comes over one in the depths of the woods at night. Perhaps it comes from the time when our ancestors did have something to be afraid of in the woods ; it may be the ingrained consciousness of the lurking Indian, or the involuntary reminiscence of an ancestral encounter with a black bear. Heine says that the

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hunting instinct has to be inherited, and that as his own ancestors, instead of hunting, were hunted, he had n't the hunting instinct himself, and could n't acquire it. Perhaps this mingled love and dread of the woods at night has to be inherited from an ancestry which frequented and loved the forests, but had occasion to fear them too.

Meantime I blunder on and on, in thick darkness at last; I stumble over stones until my feet grow sore, and drag away tough branches from in front of my face until my hands and wrists are almost painfully scratched; and just as I begin to think that I have got enough of it, and the scare begins to be something more personal than a reminiscent thrill derived from some remote Indian-fighting ancestor, I am discovered, — am dragged out of the wilderness, as it were, by a long glittering landscape of lights, stretching out beneath the hill-top to which a cart-path has led my feet. It is the inhabited world which has found me, — a multitude of lighted villages stretching across the Mystic Valley to Boston.

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A cone of street and window lights actually defines the shape of Beacon Hill itself. How the illusion of the wilderness vanishes! How I am, as it were, seized by the collar by civilization! It is an unwelcome grip. A brilliant, beautiful night landscape is spread out before me, and the way home is perfectly outlined. But I wish that I had not been discovered!

The Lily Cove

THESE late droughty days have been golden ones for out-of-door enjoyments. The farmer laments them, for his hay crop is meagre, his pasture is drying up, his corn — even his corn, *solibus aptum*, as fond of sun as Horace himself — is crying for rain, and his potatoes bid fair to be small and few in the hill. The business man trembles as the long dry days wear past, for he sees a bad harvest likely to be added to all the other wretched causes that are postponing the good times. But the perpetual picnicker sees no reason to find fault with them; the artist finds the mowing-field, stripped of its poor crop, all the

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The Lily Cove

more beautiful in his picture because the green rowen is making no start, for the parched stubble maintains a rich golden brown tint from day to day. And for careless youth, that takes no thought of the morrow, there never were days like these, — long, rainless ones marching in endless procession, when girls want to be out-of-doors all the time, and boating and swimming are a ceaseless joy, and long driving and tramping expeditions may succeed one another with literally no cloud over them; when nights are balmy and delicious; when Nature, in short, seems to be in a willing league with all pleasuring purposes.

There is one crop, moreover, which I have been assisting in the harvesting of a little lately, which is not in the least unfavorably affected by drought. It is the water-lily crop; and it is particularly beautiful in a certain spacious cove that leads out of one of the loveliest little lakes in eastern Massachusetts. It is a cove that was constructed by nature especially for the propagation of water-lilies. It is a perfect

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The Lily Cove

oval in shape, with but a narrow connection with the main lake; and across this strait runs a gravelly bar, over which you can only force the boat by throwing the weight first into the stern and then into the bow. And whereas the main lake has not a perceptible shoal in it, and practically no lilies, the water in this cove is exactly of the depth to suit the growth and perfect development of the *Nymphea odorata.* Everywhere the pads overlie the surface; but your boat may visit every spot in the cove without going aground. It is a weak figure of speech to say that every morning nowadays the cove is starred with lilies; the stars in heaven are a sparse growth compared with them; if you were treating the sky at night as a pond, and the stars as water-lilies, you would have to row your boat a great deal farther to get an armful than you do here in this cove. When you get to the end and row back westward, looking straight at the faces of the lilies, on which the rising sun is shining, you perceive that pond-lilies are not the colorless things that you might imagine.

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The Lily Cove

Their hearts are pure gold, and the whiteness of the rest of them is delicately tinted with a faint blush of pink.

They overpopulate the cove so that it is a kindness to them to pick them by the score; they are simply begging you to draw them up, long-stemmed, from the depths. The water is not a bit muddy; as you float along, you see the bottom, looking as if a sort of soft gray water-moss overspread it, and this same really beautiful substance clings to the stems of the lily leaves. All around the encircling shores is a dense wall of alders, with richly veined deep-green luxuriant leaves; oaks and red maples overhang and dominate the alders; and above all there are the tops of many pine-trees growing on the slope of the hill farther back. From somewhere in the depths comes the song of a wood thrush, at intervals; and you perceive that the note of this bird is, in the domain of musical sounds, precisely what the water-lily is to the world of vegetation, — a round, sweet, full, generous, and delightful thing, ravishing to the sense and at the same

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The Lily Cove

time symbolical of spiritual beauty. Who that knows the wood thrush's note will deny that there is a perfume in it as rich and sweet to the inner sense as that of the pond-lily is to the mere nostrils? In the long intervals between the thrush's chary notes, you hear a vireo preaching from the elm-tree that overhangs the spring not far away; and you know that from his perch in the tree this melodious little homilist will give you line upon line and precept upon precept all day long.

Such things as these make the lily cove a hard place to get away from, especially when one must leave it to get an early train back to Boston.

A Musical Guest

THE other night I made the acquaintance of a famous singer, and invited him home for the night. He came somewhat against his will; but, as other great musicians are apt to do, when he got there he fell back upon the privilege of a guest and refrained from exercising his art. The encounter happened in this way: My friend the Naturalist and I were

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A Musical Guest

walking through a pasture close by some pitch-pines, when a capital song rang out from one of the trees. "A tree-toad," said I. "A tree-frog," said the Naturalist; "there is no such thing as a tree-*toad*." "I should like to see him," said I. "There he is, on that limb," said the Naturalist, after looking a few moments. There he was, sure enough, perched on the upper side of a twig, well out of reach. He sang on merrily enough; you could see his throat (the Naturalist called it his vocal sac) puff out prodigiously with every note. His voice had excellent *timbre*, but there was a slight roughness in the quality, — it was a trifle reedy in the upper register. Nevertheless, a very good song. I was filled with a consuming desire to take the singer home for the evening, and see if his voice were as good a parlor voice as it was a pasture voice. "Will you give me a boost?" I said to the Naturalist. "I will," said he. In a moment more I was swinging from the lower limb of the pitch-pine tree, and grasping the air actively and gracefully with both feet.

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A Musical Guest

In a moment more I was scrambling up among the branches. Presently I came directly under the tree-toad, who had quite ceased to sing, and was now crouching fearfully on his twig, apparently much alarmed. I made a lunge at him. The tree-toad shot through the air, — a gray-green streak.

But he landed on a tuft toward the end of the branch; and thither I precariously followed him, and caught him after the same strategic fashion in which we all used to catch flies at school. The poor little fellow twisted and struggled in his captor's hand. It was now necessary to get down out of the tree; if it had n't been necessary, probably I should never have got down. "*Hyla versicolor*," said the Naturalist, when he saw him. On the way home the little fellow's heart, or his lungs, throbbed constantly against his bearer's hand. It was rather pitiful; you could imagine him saying, "Oh, fatal gift of song! Why did Heaven bestow this accomplishment upon me to betray me to my ruin?" It was necessary to hold him very close, for he seemed to be able

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A Musical Guest

to get through an aperture only about one-eighth his size. Once home, and put in a thin glass tumbler, he began to sprawl about, showing the queer disks that are on the inner side of his toes, and his finely beaded pink stomach, with which he seemed to be able to hang on, too. He was a beautiful little creature as he sat on the table under the tumbler; his back was mottled greenish-gray, quite brilliant, and there were black streaks along his sides. His sharp little black eyes projected outward from the corners of his head. His throat throbbed ceaselessly. His hands had each a thumb and three fingers, but on his feet (his hind feet, perhaps it should be said) there were five toes all disked in that funny way.

He steadily declined to sing in the house. As he had sat on his twig in the pine-tree, a mere speck, and uttered his shrill note, which you could hear a long way off, he seemed a mere stationary voice; but here he was voiceless. He simply sprawled about, blinked his beady eyes in boundless astonishment and deep concern, and said nothing. It was impossible to

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A Musical Guest

cramp and confine him thus; and before long he was in an apple-tree outside the door. There he never peeped all night, and I will venture all I have that Signor Hyla Versicolor was making seven-league jumps toward the pasture and the pine-tree.

How the Storm Came and Went

PEOPLE had been vaguely conscious of the coming of the storm throughout the afternoon, though there was no visible sign of it. Summer storms send a good many tons of their weight on before them to bear forebodingly down upon people's languid shoulders and sweaty brows. As the end of the day came near, a great darkness overspread the western and northern heavens, — a darkness that was presently concentrated in a vast, jagged, fiercely frowning thunder-cloud, that rose and rose, dimming the horizon and the great hills. By and by the wonderful and really spectacular thing of the storm came, — a strange crimson flush, that grew from a mere spot, and overspread the thickest of the cloud in the northwest. It could hardly have been the setting

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How the Storm Came and Went

sun breaking through the clouds, for they were black and impenetrable. When the lightning-flashes came they simply extended and deepened this strange bloody expanse; it seemed electrical, whether it was or not. It was a red thunderstorm! Storms are bad enough when they are black, but this was a great deal worse.

People hastily gathered their belongings, which the intense heat had scattered out of doors, summoned their thinly dressed babies and shut down all their windows, — closing in all the heat and making ovens of their houses. The black-red storm drifted along; its ragged edges pitched angrily this way and that, as if each one had volition; it would not have taken the strongest imagination to see in their movements an awful battle of angels. The red light faded out. The wind came roaring along, bending the protesting elms and whitening the windward sides of their leaf masses. The war of the angels passed quite over one's head with terrific clamor, for the lightnings were now at work. Some few drops of rain splashed against one's face. The darkness

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How the Storm Came and Went

of night closed in, relieved from moment to moment by the dazzling lightnings, which went in chains and wavy streaks across and up and down, making the green fields suddenly and fiercely red under their flashes. Now a bolt came down not far away, with a roar which seemed to split the air.

But the storm wore itself out without any great downpour, — perhaps without the breaking of a branch. It was just a splendid heavenly spectacle, meant to give a sort of high delight to us; it was a bit of that sublime terrorizing of our souls which really makes us very happy, because it makes us realize that we have souls that will take in great things!

What poet has described the death of a storm, — the recession of the violet lightnings; their slow withdrawal into the eternity beyond the horizon; the flying thunders turning and roaring as if in spiteful defiance; the intensity of silence and darkness; the strong relief of the forest against the sudden illumination; the strange sadness of spirit that one feels, as if the departing storm were carrying away

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some dear part of ourselves? The storm's going is more spiritual than its coming; its inspiration a more private and intimate thing. The dullest lout gazes, marvelling, at the rising thunder-clouds; but when the storm is fading away, he goes comfortably to sleep, leaving its melancholy raptures to you. Its farthest gleam is dear to you; its faintly reverberating dying thunders are most expressive music in your soul.

How the Storm Came and Went

THE rare, ripe, delicious midsummer season belongs in an especial way to our singing locust, — that long-winded, warm-hearted, strenuous little fellow who sits up in the tree and sings loudest and clearest at the hottest moment of the hottest day. All sorts of strong, joyous and beautiful things go with this creature and his song, in the mind of the lover of sunshine, — purple hills, hazy green-blue skies, copious foliage rustling lovingly in the hot wind, the poison-ivy rioting gloriously over the walls, the wild sunflowers gladly holding up their beautiful frank faces to be kissed rudely by

The Cicada's Time

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The Cicada's Time

their god, fields ablush with red-top or silvery with the dried-up June grass, cows up to their backs in the water among the lily pads, long yellow sprays from the chestnut blossoms sailing slowly earthward from the high tree-tops, and above and around all that intoxicating summer air which makes one forget all moody speculations and spiritual cravings, and disposes him to be simply and physically happy — just like this same breezy, intense, monotonous little singer up in the tree!

We have, in this latitude, several seasons of great beauty in the out-of-door world; we have but one brief season of perfect joyfulness in Nature, and that is the season in midsummer when all things are at the summit of their production, and nothing — not even the early-reddening sumach — has begun to anticipate the autumn. Just at this time the birds have not much to say. Morning and evening they warble a little; but if the matter were left to them, midday would be silent. Now the cicada, jealous of the musical reputation of his own beloved season, compresses all their

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The Cicada's Time

strains into one intense unmodulated cry, and pours it forth from the tree-top. Louder and louder he sings: he cannot stop to vary it; he cannot spare any of it to work down into melodies; he must make it louder and louder and fuller and stronger with an eerie intensity of enthusiasm, until his voice seems to fail all at once from over-stress and over-excitement, and his song comes to an end with a sort of croak, like an over-wrought church-organ that has suddenly lost its breath. The more delicate strains of song and tints of bloom belong to the springtime, when the linnet woos his mate, and the violet blooms modestly among the mosses; but frosts come then, and men and women and children go into fits of despair waiting for the warmth. Autumn is a season of a thousand enchantments, most of which are melancholy; but midsummer, less tender than either season, perhaps, and very little given to coynesses and coquetries, is the only season whose delights are perfect, — whose very discomforts are cheering, whose worst failings are more than three-quarters virtues.

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The Cicada's Time

How foolish those people are who fancy that summer is an "unhealthy" season, — something to be feared and dreaded! When is it that old and feeble people are carried away? Is it in summer? Of course not: it is in winter or spring that the cords of lives are snapped. It stands to reason that summer must be the season of health and recuperation; then our doors and windows are open, and we breathe fresh air all day and night. Then we lead lives that approach natural conditions. Then the air often — and sometimes even the sun — gets to our starved and suffocated skins. Then, with heavy garments thrown aside, clad in light textures, and with tan on our faces, we take on something of the aspect of men and women. To be sure, the little babies die in thousands in hot tenement houses in summer, and keep up city death rates; but these babies' deaths are not to be laid to Nature's door, — they are murders, nothing but that; society's murders in the first degree. If all men lived in summer as they should and might live, there need be very few deaths in Mas-

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sachusetts from May to October. This will make some contemptuous superior person smile; but let this person ask the first wise physician whom he meets, and he may tell him that it is true.

The Cicada's Time

At the Threshold of Perfection

THERE is a place I have lately visited where I have found myself, in the supreme August days, nearer to the Eternal Secret than anywhere else, — nearer than in the unprofaned forest, nearer than on the stainless shore of the ocean, where poets and philosophers often wait in the hope of taking that secret by surprise. The poet, indeed, might turn away from the place with a shudder. It is a great tract of burned woodland, — a long reach of hill and dale where, before the leaves came last spring, a terrible fire raged, which left scarcely a living thing in its path. Far and near one sees blackened trunks, or the branches of pines standing against the sky like dark antlers. The ledges of rock have dark cindery spaces. My first impulse was to run away from so much deso-

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At the Threshold of Perfection

lation. I remained, and found more of divinity here than I could have guessed: two great gods, indeed, walked side by side in beautiful agreement, — the divinities of Destruction and of Creation: the force which tears down, and the force which builds up. Now, in August, at this real flood-tide of the year, this great burned tract is not merely a scene of death, but also one of exuberant and all-conquering life.

From every stump of a burned tree scores of young shoots have sprung, all crowding their juicy boughs and great young leaves up into the air with tremendous haste and vigor. From the powdery earth, enriched by the ashes of the holocaust, young poplar-trees and birches and many other growths have pushed up independently from seeds or roots, and are thriving as one never heard of trees thriving before. The young oaks and hickories are growing so fast that their topmost leaves have had no time to get their green pigment, — of which, indeed, there seems not enough to go around in such a mob of furiously growing

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At the Threshold of Perfection

things, — and so they are of all colors, hit or miss, red, brown, purple, and sometimes almost blue. But the older, lower leaves have come in for their share of greenness, and wear their proper tint, with even a little added intensity thrown in for good measure. Here and there among the young thickets a splendid red lily lingers, beyond its season, as if reluctant to leave such a scene of natural riot; and the rosy plumes of the fireweed nod in frequent clumps. But there is no need of flowers for color; the young leaves of the oak and hickory give that in abundance.

It is not alone the presence of these two divinities of Death and Life, with Death thus ministering to a new and more splendid Life, that suggests the eternal balance of things, — the divine Equilibrium which the philosopher dreams in his moments of highest insight. All other things in Nature, even her peculiar August silences, tell of that. This is the month when all life reaches its maximum, its summit, and when as yet the decline of autumn has not begun. The very landscape trembles in an

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At the Threshold of Perfection

ecstasy of accomplishment, — an exquisite consciousness of perfection. Nature breathes her love upon the earth in ardent heat. The birds are silent, as if awed beyond utterance; a little while ago a vireo tried to set up his monotonous work-a-day song, as if knowing that his is as little irreverential as any song could be, but it fluttered away and died. . Only the unabashed cicada translates the heat and the tremor of earth and air into a long ecstatic thrill. This is the time when the poet or the philosopher, if he be of those who have been admitted to the secret of Nature, may hear her very heart-beat, — not in fancy at all, but in sober truth.

Though the burned woodland is a rare place in which to meet something of these mysteries which many yearn to know, and only a few will ever understand, and no one will ever impart by words to any other, it is not the only place where one may in August meet them face to face. There is a special quality about the flowers of the month. The clethra, which abounds along the lakeside, and reigns

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At the Threshold of Perfection

over all the scents of August, has not the over-sweet *growing* perfume of the azalea, which blooms in spring, nor the tender, modest, retiring fragrance of the violets; it is a pervasive odor, that goes a long way on the breeze with woody ripeness, and is spicy and satisfying but never coarse. The golden-rod, so very long and so wonderfully deliberate in perfecting its flowers, — we have seen them forming for months, — is perfect now, and will be as long in letting go its gold as it has been in gaining it. The button-bush holds its white globules in the air, each one a perfect little planet, a symbol of pure completeness; and the cardinal-flower flames out along the brook as if to show that, if August can produce perfect whiteness and pure gold, it has also the reddest blood of all the months in its veins.

Animal life is very quiet now. If the birds still make love, they do not chatter about it. The squirrels have some running about to do, but they do it silently. All manner of queer insect life is exuberant and interesting. On a

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At the Threshold of Perfection

clethra branch I came yesterday upon a curious white spider, with two faint little yellow-brown bars on its back; as soon as it saw that a dangerous being had plucked its branch, the little creature, eruditely aware of the principle of protective resemblances, ran swiftly and placed itself on the white blossom, where it assuredly would not have been perceived at all if it had not already been seen on a green leaf. All the little toads have come out of the water and have stationed themselves on the hottest, sunniest banks they can find, whence they scatter in a sort of living shower if you disturb them. The milk-adder unwinds his spotted length in the flickering shade of a sassafras bush, — a beautiful creature, whose like you will not encounter in every summer day's journey.

Every night now, August reveals her celestial perfections in the supremest beauty. The waxing moon, Saturn, the white Vega, Arcturus, rule the evening; the great planets reserve their splendor for a more auroral hour, when Jupiter and Venus appear in their magnificence. In the south the Scorpion trails

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At the Threshold of Perfection

his length across the skies, just a little of him lost in the haze of the horizon ; but the bow of the Archer is bent upon him. The young moon goes down and down, reddening as she sinks to the horizon ; her path slowly fades out from the bosom of the lake even before she has reached the earth's rim. The other night, on my bed in a cottage in the depths of the woods, I heard some hounds baying, as they hunted on their own account. Their voices rose and fell, receded, once more approached, fell away again, bringing back to my soul the wild, perfect music of wolves on elemental western plains ; for a moment I felt an instinct to go out and join them in their mad hunt through the forest. I know that this moment's strange alliance with the animal world has its part in the perfectness of the season, for it is born out of the depths of the beautiful old wildness that lies latent in all our natures, and splendidly gives the lie to the artifices and hypocrisies of civilization.

The August night passes in happy waking that one would not exchange for sleep. With

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At the Threshold of Perfection

the rising of the sun, its coolness, the one premonition of autumn and of dying, takes to flight, and the living heat comes on apace. A few birds sing faintly in the cool of the dawn; but presently the hawk, screaming high above the clearing, has uttered the real keynote of the August day. It is not a time of gentle, modest melodies, nor of soft venturing life, but of high tones, and of all things strong, complete, full-grown, and bold.

THE END

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IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,
FOR COPELAND AND DAY, PUBLISH-
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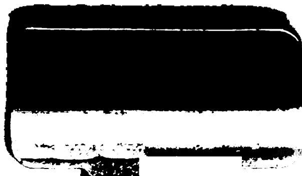
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